

Message Text

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SUBJECT: FLEMISH SEPARATISM AND THE BELGIAN ELECTION
CAMPAIGN

1. SUMMARY. BOTH THE FLEMISH NATIONALIST VOLKSUNIE AND THE WALLONIAN REGIONALIST COALITION (WALLONIAN RALLY/ DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF FRANCOPHONES) ARE EXPECTED TO IMPROVE THEIR STANDINGS IN THE MARCH 10 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. IN THE 1971 ELECTIONS THESE LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST FORMATIONS WON 23 PCT OF THE TOTAL VOTE, COMPARED WITH 30 PCT FOR THE CATHOLICS, 27 PCT FOR THE SOCIALIST, 16 PCT FOR THE FREE-ENTERPRISE LIBERALS, AND 3 PCT FOR THE COMMUNISTS. THE DISPARATE VIEWS AND INTERESTS OF THE FLEMISH AND WALLONIA
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LINGUISTIC PARTIES AND THEIR CONSTITUENCIES, NOT WITHSTANDING

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT SOCIALIST PARTY INSISTENCE ON REMAINING IN OPPOSITION COULD BRING THESE PARTIES INTO A GOVERNMENT COALITION WITH THE CATHOLICS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN BELGIAN HISTORY. DESPITE CURRENT AND LONG-STANDING CONCERNS ABOUT FLEMISH SEPARATISM, THE ALREADY ESTABLISHED DYNAMICS BY WHICH BELGIAN INSTITUTIONS ARE EVOLVING AWAY FROM THE CONCEPTS OF A UNITARY STATE IN THE DIRECTION OF INCREASED FEDERALISM, AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT VARIOUS FEDERALIST FORCES WILL EMERGE STRENGTHENED FROM THE MARCH ELECTIONS, THE EMBASSY SEES NO THREAT TO BELGIAN TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY FROM EITHER FLEMISH SEPARATISTS OR WALLONIAN REGIONALISTS. END SUMMARY.

2. FLEMISH NATIONALISM. THE FLEMISH NATIONALIST VOLKSUNIE PARTY CONTAINS MODERATES WHO ARE WILLING TO WORK WITHIN THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK OF AN INCREASINGLY FEDERAL BELGIAN STATE, AS WELL AS EXTREMISTS EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO THE GOAL OF A SEPARATE FLEMISH STATE. THE LATTER GLORY IN THE LABEL "EXTREMIST". IN PRINCIPLE THEY WOULD OPPOSE TAKING PART IN TA FUTURE GOVERNMENT COALITION WITH THE COSICAL CHRISTIANS. OTHER MORE MODERATE ELEMENTS IN THE VOLKSUNIE WELCOME THE INCREASED RESPECTABILITY THEIR FEDERALIST/REGIONALIST VIEWPOINTS HAVE WON IN RECENT YEARS. UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS THEY COULD PROVE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN A GOVERNMENT.

3. FLEMISH NATIONALIST IDEAS. SO LONG AS FLEMISH EXTREMISTS HAVE NO RESPONSIBILITIES, SOME OF THEM FEEL NO INHIBITIONS ABOUT PREACHING THE BREAKUP OF THE BELGIAN STATE AND THE EMERGENCE OF A FLEMISH STATE "IN A NEW EUROPE". THIS IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD AS A EUROPEAN COMMUNITY IN WHICH TRADITIONAL NATIONALISMS HAVE GIVEN WAY BOTH TO SUPRANATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND TO NEW REGIONAL NATIONALISMS OF THE FLEMISH, BRETON, WELSH, BASQUE OR EVEN CROAT VARIETY, AND INCLUDES A VARIANT BY WHICH A NEW "NORTHERN" COMMUNITY GROUPED AROUND GERMANY WOULD SEPARATE FROM A "SOUTHERN" COMMUNITY AROUND FRANCE.

4. COMPETITION IN FLANDERS. IN THE FLEMISH HALF OF BELGIUM, FOUR PAR-
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TIES ARE IN ELECTORAL COMPETITION:

--THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS (CVP) WHOSE PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN AND LEADING CANDIDATE FOR THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP IS LEO TINDEMANS;
--THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB) WHOSE STAR PERFORMER IN FLANDERS IS WILLY CLAES;
--THE LIBERALS (PVV), WHOSE LEADING SPOKESMEN ARE WILLY DECLERCQ AND HERMAN DE CROOV

-- THE VOLKSUNIE, UNDER HUGO SCHILTZ.
IN THE OUTGOING PARLIAMENT, THESE FOUR FLEMISH PARTIES
HELD 43, 27, 18, AND 19 SEATS RESPECTIVELY OUT OF THE
TOTAL 212.

5. TV DEBATE. TINDEMANS, CLAES, DE CROO AND SCHILTZ TOOK
PART IN A SPECIAL PRE-ELECTORAL TELEVISION ROUNDTABLE
DEBATE FEBRUARY 19 ORGANIZED BY THE FRENCH-LANGUAGE
CHAIN (RTB) AND ITS POLITICAL DIRECTOR MARTHE DAMON.
ALL FOUR SPOKESMEN FAVORED GREATER FEDERALISM IN
BELGIUM I.E. MORE DECENTRALIZED, REGIONAL AUTHORITY.
ALL FOUR AGREED THAT THE MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEM IN THAT
CONNECTION WILL BE TO DEFINE THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE
PREDOMINANTLY FRENCH SPEAKING BRUSSELS-BRABANT REGION
IN RELATION TO FLANDERS AND WALLONIA.

6. SCHILTZ ON SEPARATISM. ONLY SCHILTZ ACCEPTED THE
LABEL OF "FLAMINGANT". HE DEFINED THIS AS MEANING
A PERSON WHO PUTS ETHNIC COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS AHEAD
OF IDEOLOGICAL-DOCTRINAL (E.G. SOCIALIST OR FREE ENTER-
PRISE) OR CONFESSIONAL (CATHOLIC) CONSIDERATIONS. "IF
ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY" (A LA RIGUEUR), HE SAID, THE
VOLKSUNIE WOULD WANT A SEPARATE FLEMISH STATE, BUT
OTHERWISE PREFERS TO SATISFY ITS COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES
WITHIN THE NATIONAL BELGIAN STATE.

7. CLAES, NIXON AND BELGIUM. IN SHARPLY DISASSOCIATING
HIMSELF FROM THE SCHILTZ POINT OF VIEW ON EVEN REMOTELY
FAVORING A SEPARATE FLANDERS "IN THE EUROPE OF TOMMORROW",
ECONOMICS MINISTER CLAES COMMENTED: "NIXON ALMOST FORGOT
THE EXISTENCE OF BELGIUM--LOTS OF LUCK WITH YOUR FLANDERS*"

8. COMMENT. THIS WAS A REFERENCE TO THE OMISSION OF
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BELGIUM FROM THE LIST OF COUNTRIES ORIGINALLY INVITED
TO THE WASHINGTON ENERGY CONFERENCE. THE FACT THAT
CLAES FELT NO NEED TO SPELL OUT THAT THE "OMISSION"
RELATED TO THE ORIGINAL USG INVITATION TO THE WASHINGTON
ENERGY CONFERENCE. THIS IS AN INDICATION OF ITS STRONG IMPACT,
AND A REMINDER OF THE CONTINUED FORCE OF TRADITIONAL
NATIONAL SENSIBILITIES IN BELGIUM, AS ELSEWHERE IN
EUROPE. ON THE OTHER HAND, OUR APPROACH HAS PROVIDED
ONE TRADITIONAL PARTY LEADER A CONVENIENT ARGUMENT
FOR NATIONAL UNITY.

9. TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS WORK GREATLY TO AMPLIFY
AND EXAGGERATE GENUINE CONCERNS IN BELGIUM OVER NATIONAL
UNITY. MOST OF THE PARTIES SEE ADVANTAGE IN PROCLAIMING
ON OCCASION THAT UNLESS THEY ARE SUPPORTED, BELGIUM MAY

BREAK UP BECAUSE OF THE UNREASONABLE POSITIONS OF OTHERS.
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